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ABSTRACT

While early community colleges were often located in abandoned high schools or hospitals, or in shared facilities with public schools, they have now come into their own, often in imaginative and innovative facilities. Community college design offers an opportunity for development of an environment that is complementary to the larger environment of which the college is an integral part. Actual practice has not always resulted in such environmental harmony. Yet, several colleges of design excellence can be noted, including Foothill College in California, Allegheny College in Pittsburgh, Miami-Dade College in Florida, Seward County College in Kansas, Pima College in Arizona, and Mount Vernon College in Washington, D. C. It appears that the future of the community college, in terms of design, will be closely associated with the concepts of flexibility and adaptability. The community college campus has always been changing and must continue to change in order to reflect new programs, ideas, and lifestyles of its students and the community. (Author/JDS)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE ARCHITECTURE

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fascinating developments in the realm of architecture is the rise of a new "building-type" known as the community college. Philosophically, the freshness and vibrancy of community college architecture can only be compared to the similar characteristics of its revolutionary educational concept.

Unfortunately, this positive situation has not always existed. As Edmund Gleazer explains, "Until the late 1950's, all too often community and junior colleges were to be found in abandoned high schools or unused hospitals, or they shared facilities with public schools. That situation no longer prevails. Old structures have been replaced with new. Whole new campuses have sprung up. While it is true that colleges . . . may start in temporary facilities, they move forward quickly with building plans, often coming up with imaginative and innovative facilities."

The purpose of this paper is to explore the architectural world of the community college, note present shortcomings, point out examples of design excellence, and predict what the future may hold in store.

I. Overview of Problems and Practices

James Morisseau tells us, "School architecture is undergoing a transformation . . . the egg-crate school is vanishing alone with the educational philosophy that spawned it." What then is the modern community college like, architecturally speaking?

Edmund Gleazer states, "For architects and facility planners, the two-year college explosion offers problems and challenges that, if not unique, are certainly different. In few other sectors of higher education are whole campuses and even multi-campuses being planned and developed in one great swoop, often within the space of months rather than years." He also says, "The most significant aspect of a community college is that of its individuality, unbound by tradition." He feels no two campuses should be alike.

Expanding further on this theme, Donald-David Logan writes, ". . . each community college is, or should be, as unique as the special needs of the particular place and people dictate. But if one characteristic (besides their handsomeness) can be said . . . of community colleges . . . it is that their universal open door policy has been carried over to become a main element of each school's program, plan, and design. They are open to, and integrated with their physical surroundings, whether that be open country, suburbia, or inner city."

From John Kistler's excellent study, we learn that in general, community colleges show ability to adapt to the site, relating to it, rather than fighting with it. Also, since they are generally newer than colleges, they reflect "modern design" much more often. They sometimes develop a concrete monumentality, allowing a comparison of sorts to prisons, but the better designs usually avoid this. Kistler offers a sidelight that community colleges give architects an opportunity to flex their creative muscles.

Summing up, "many new community college campuses are handsome places which generate pride in the students and faculty who use them, and in the community whose votes paid for building and operating them" (Elizabeth Thompson).

There are some critics, however, of present-day community college architecture. Robert Sommer talks about what he calls "hard architecture," characterized by cold, inhuman forms, spaces, and materials; monumental scale of buildings; and technological, non-personal aspects. He charges, "Nowhere is the architecture as hard as on the instant campuses" and warns of the "close physical resemblance between the campus and the prison."

Sommer relates a typical example of faulty design thinking: "The architect for a 3,000-student junior college in Rhode Island selected a megastructure over a traditional campus plan because he thought a single building would 'force disparate groups of students and faculty together'." Not only was this a dangerous assumption, but also it was not a winning strategy. As Sommer says, "Enforced proximity is no guarantee of contact, communication, or community. . . ."

Finally, Sommer pronounces the need for a campus made for walking and meeting people, one in which a sense of community develops, and the factory/time-clock/"punching-out" aspect is eliminated.

In Kistler's study, other problems were encountered. He writes, "The concept and advantages of the compact-designed college . . . are virtually unknown in the average community college."

Compactness was "seldom encountered;" most of the colleges preferred the campus plan (a group of several buildings). Kistler's main argument here is financial in nature: "When the campus plan is used, the cost of construction increases substantially over the compact concept."

Secondly, "there was a minor amount of flexibility or adaptability. . . . Attempts to design and construct flexible spaces was limited to only one building studied." Kistler believes "new schools should seem to express openness and adaptability" and that these characteristics ". . . are frequently not considered by architects and designers of educational facilities."

Finally, a somewhat frightening development is revealed: "many (community colleges) are obsolete upon completion. Architects and administrators are ignoring to some degree technological advances in planning educational facilities."

Surely all community colleges cannot claim the glowing, desirable qualities nor the faulty, undesirable characteristics mentioned. It would be safe to say each has a mixture of good and bad points. In the interest of good architecture and quality education, we should identify some of the more prominent examples of excellent design in community colleges.

II. Survey of Selected Community Colleges

Foothill College in California was perhaps the "best" campus in terms of design excellence, uniqueness, and (surprisingly) popularity. "Students say they like it, and they certainly behave

lovingly toward it. Faculty members gripe naturally, but they turn down work elsewhere and cite the felicitous environment here in explanation. The administration speaks in happy superlatives. Citizenry in the district visit it on weekends as if it were a public garden--which it is" (Montgomery). Foothill is most appropriate in terms of both "aesthetics and symbolism of the design" and "the functional aspects of the campus in terms of user needs" (Montgomery).

The design team for Foothill College attempted to create ". . . an imagery that signified neither high school nor university, but stood instead for a warm welcoming place somewhere in between" (Montgomery). Some call it an "academic village." The campus has a low vandalism rate due to ". . . the dignity and love engendered by the campus design" (Montgomery). Perhaps the reason there are so few "Foothills" is because of politics: architects can be selected politically and the product unfortunately becomes standardized.

Another fine example of progressive architecture is Allegheny CC in downtown Pittsburgh. The idea here is to visually link the school to the main city and call attention to the former. Critics call it a one-of-a-kind sculpture, with its strong building forms; it is ". . . bold, romantic and imaginative in the way its forms take command of the hill" (Thompson) on which it resides. The internal spaces were to be ". . . generative and flexible, able to adapt and absorb the changing needs of education. The hope was to create an intricate design with a variety which would surprise, lure, and upon occasion, awe the spectator" (Thompson).

Miami-Dade CC, Downtown Campus, is one of the several examples where a downtown inner city area is brightened and revitalized by the presence of a college. "The strong cubistic forms of the buildings are in startling- and intentional- contrast to the old buildings nearby" (Thompson). The site is park-like, uniting city and campus, and invites pedestrians at the street level. The seven-story "vertical plaza" (atrium) inside the building " . . . is impressive, inviting, involving--just what the college wanted its building to be" (Thompson).

Seward County C/JC in Liberal, Kansas, is unique in its circulation system. The college ". . . uses a circular drive and parking areas which frame the campus itself. Entry corridors radiate from the peripheral areas to the different buildings" (AS&U 3/75). Earth berms surround the campus to give a sealed-off effect from the activities in the central areas.

Two developments seek to bridge the educational age gap. Anniston Educational Park in Alabama has a mix ranging from preschool 3-year-olds to 2-year college students within the same complex. Officials claim it is a ". . . possible tool for school integration, educational efficiency, and economy" (Morisseau). New North Community School in Springfield, Mass., is actually three separate buildings connected by an underground mall. The idea was to bridge two communities separated by railroad and super-highway. The school serves over a thousand fourth to sixth graders in a community center for adults.

With the large number of community colleges built in the last few years, many others stand out design-wise. Listed below are but a few:

* ALLEN COUNTY C/JC, Iola, Kansas--strong modern design, housed in only three buildings (academic/student center/dormitory) because of small enrollment.

* PIMA CC, Tucson, Arizona--respect and use of beautiful desert site, reaction to climate and learning approach. Academic buildings--small scale, informal, quiet. Public buildings--grand scale, formal, mixing areas.

* CRAFTON CC, Redlands, California--"cluster concept," use of difficult site, pleasant openness, beautiful views, building identities while keeping campus unity.

* PORTLAND CC, Portland, Oregon--complex of six departments clustered about a central mall, outside system of open corridors, all-pervasive openness, visibility/display, educational shopping center, accessibility, indivisibility between vocational/trade programs and academics.

* MANHATTAN CC, New York City--meets educational needs of students and complex urgent needs of urban community, enclosed pedestrian mall, no barriers between college and community, inviting, attractive.

* CUYAHOGA CC, Cleveland, Ohio--handling of limited site in urban renewal area of Cleveland, platform concept (parking below, people and buildings above), inward orientation of buildings, relief from depressing surrounding area.

* UNION COLLEGE, Cranford, New Jersey--impressive planning for expansion, phasing of structures, flexibility in planning, recognition of site attributes, circulation patterns.

* OAKLAND CC, Farmington, Michigan--space/forms in response to educational program and organization, flow of people, reinforcement of student activities, climatic considerations, exterior spaces, scale.

* ROCHESTER STATE JC, Rochester, Minnesota--expressive building form, reflects internal activities, fitting of buildings into site, handling of major/minor concepts, continuity throughout.

* STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, Morrisville, New York--well-organized plan, flow of people, views into/away from site, use of building form and materials, care given to details.

* MOUNT VERNON JC, Washington, D.C.--utilization of limited site, respect to existing facilities, preserves natural beauty, contemporary, separation of auto/people traffic, small-scaled exterior spaces.

* LORAIN COUNTY CC, Lorain County, Ohio--inviting spaces, reflects educational programs, ability to expand while appearing complete, separation of auto/people traffic.

* EL CENTRO COLLEGE, Dallas, Texas--use of existing facility, captures spirit of college program, quality of older period with function of present, revitalization of inner city.

In addition, several other campuses deserve recognition:

Lake Michigan College, Detroit, Michigan

Passaic CC, Patterson, New Jersey

Edmonds CC, Lynnwood, Washington

Northampton County Area CC, Bethlehem, Penn.

Kennedy-King College, Chicago, Ill.

Wisconsin State Univ., Fond du Lac, Wisc.

Columbia JC, Columbia, Cal.

Fullerton JC, Fullerton, Cal.

III. Future Outlook

We have seen that the community college is a rapidly developing building form, with the "abandoned high school/Army barracks" concept only a memory. What ideas and goals have been formulated for the future?

Hughes and Reed believe our "goal is to make them as much a part of the community as possible." This can be done by "planning solutions which invite and encourage participation by the community" in the form of social/cultural events, conferences, seminars, and the use of library and athletic facilities.

Kistler firmly states, "Educational ideas, not architectural design, should dictate the conditions of new construction to provide optimum environments for learning."

According to Gleazer, the new movement presents a challenge to the architect. Facilities must be adaptable. Used often in this context is flexibility, both externally (expansion potential) and internally (space changes). Also involved is the multi-use of space. While there may be many, many new community colleges, "this does not necessarily mean that they will all have palace-like campuses, set off in tree-lined pastures of beautiful valleys. Many

of these colleges will be started in urban areas." Architecture will have to work within the context of the inner city. This does not necessarily mean constructing new buildings, but converting old buildings that still have life. It means integrating into the fabric of the city and interlacing with other activities (small shops, light industry).

Another interesting angle with reference to the community college is that of identity. "The architectural statement which is the community college campus can reveal as much as the actions of its teachers, the actual collegiate ethos. Further, by its arrangement, the campus reveals whether or not the institution takes seriously its responsibility to serve as a community center to which adults continuously turn for cultural and intellectual stimulation and enlightenment. Since communities are constantly changing, campuses which provide for them must be flexible" (Community College Planning). Hughes and Reed agree: "Flexibility must . . . be a key word in planning community college facilities."

"Educators differ as to whether there should even be a formal campus. Some hold that the college should be spread about the community--where the action is. Others see a value in the image created by a campus proper, the opportunity to enjoy a physical environment different and more dramatic than many of the students have ever experienced before. Many urban colleges have both. . ." (Hughes and Reed).

One little known aspect of the campus design problem is that

an "enormous chasm" usually exists between the Department of Architecture or Design and those responsible for the design and maintenance of the campus, according to Sommer. This can be verified on our own campus, with regard to the mammoth coliseum/activities center project.

Perhaps Hughes and Reed simplify best what we can expect: "The future of the community college is unpredictable, if the past decade is any indication. For the immediate future, the best guess is for a continued urgent scramble for space--new, old, any kind, anywhere. The trend will continue to dispersion and diversification of facilities, but with a majority of planners adhering to 'the campus' in some form."

CONCLUSION

By and large, the community college has had a relatively short but exciting architectural history. Moving from undesirable, abandoned facilities to new and innovative campuses in such a short time is nothing less than amazing.

Design-wise, we can conclude that the community college has come a long way, but in many cases still has some distance to go. New campuses dot the country, but some do not fit the educational programs. Urban campuses revitalize inner cities, but must cope with socio-economic problems. Older campuses form pleasant memories, but may very well be obsolete.

In short, the community coll-ge has always been changing and must continue to change, in order to reflect the programs, ideas, and lifestyles of the students and community it represents.

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